

Taoiseach Micheál Martin,  
Department of An Taoiseach,  
Government Buildings,  
Dublin 2.

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021

Dear Taoiseach,

In response to the recent publication of the Government's blueprint to transform rural Ireland, *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*, we write to ask for your commitment to a complementary plan to transform and renew urban Ireland. An action plan is urgently needed to support our cities as they struggle to cope with the significant changes wrought by the Covid-19 crisis.

Cities are the demographic, economic, and cultural hubs of our country, and their future success is vital to national prosperity and wellbeing. Ireland's investment in public transport, the public realm, and other urban infrastructure has long lagged behind that of our European counterparts. Now, our cities also face the extraordinary challenge of Covid-19. Cities are constantly called upon to change and innovate, to become smarter, more sustainable, and resilient. But the pandemic has dramatically accelerated existing trends, particularly in the areas of remote working and the digital agenda. These changes raise profound questions about the future of Ireland's cities and the long-term viability of many of the jobs and businesses they support.

Both the urban and rural economies have been affected by the current crisis, but in vastly different ways. While both look forward with hope to a period of recovery and renewal when the crisis abates, only rural Ireland has been placed at the centre of the Government's policy response.

Urban recovery is a national priority, which cannot be simply left to local authorities with limited means and resources. Failure to properly plan and support the recovery of urban Ireland risks a devastating impact not only on our city centres, but also on the broader city regions and rural hinterlands which they support. The unique and unprecedented challenges facing cities must be at the heart of the Government's strategy for economic recovery.

The National Development Plan commits to a future of sustainable compact growth and high-density brownfield redevelopment, reversing the historic pattern of unplanned suburban sprawl. If these aspirations are to survive the impact of Covid-19, Ireland will need an ambitious strategy for its urban areas that addresses the converging challenges of digitalisation, remote working, and the rapid pace of change in retail. It will need a holistic action plan with measures to boost urban living and footfall, encourage the night-time economy, invest in active travel infrastructure and the public realm, and deliver the vision of the 15 Minute City.



Project Ireland 2040 places city regions at the heart of policy decision making in both the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework. Cities drive both urban and regional growth and underpin the success of the national economy, in a post-Covid world we need to build on those policy frameworks and strengthen our cities and their regions.

We acknowledge the very considerable support which the Government has provided to many businesses in the form of direct financial aid over the past year. However, businesses in our cities now need to know how they will be supported to reopen and adapt during the recovery phase so that they can successfully emerge from the crisis and return to growth. They need assurance about the future of the urban trading environment, and the Government's plan to ensure that Ireland's cities survive and flourish.

As the representatives of the business communities of Ireland's five city regions, we would value the opportunity to discuss this with you in further detail.

Kind regards,

Conor Healy

CEO, Cork Chamber of Commerce

Mary Rose Burke

CEO, Dublin Chamber of Commerce

Kenny Deery

CEO, Galway Chamber of Commerce

Dee Ryan

CEO, Limerick Chamber of Commerce

Gerald Hurley

CEO, Waterford Chamber of Commerce



City Regions Ireland brings together the Chambers of Commerce of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, and Waterford in one voice to further the urban agenda.